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**The institutionalisation of schools  
and the implications for identity of experienced teachers:  
The case of International Baccalaureate World Schools**

**Abstract**

This study explored the effect that the institutionalisation forces required by the 'IB World School' authorisation process has on the identity of experienced teachers. The research analyses these institutionalising forces and the way they are carried and communicated. The institutionalising forces have a significant effect on the identity of experienced teachers. The research confirms that teacher identity is dynamic and that the identity of experienced teachers can change significantly. The institutionalisation process is powerful and appears to be coercive. However, the teachers appear to be willing participants in the institutionalisation process, and the sense of coercion we identified may be an unintended consequence of the process of establishing institutional legitimacy. As chains and groups of schools become more prevalent internationally, and in the English school system, the institutionalisation process in schools and the effect on the identity of teachers who work in them is likely to become more significant.

**Keywords**

Institutionalisation; Institutional legitimacy; Institutional primary task; Teacher identity

## Introduction

The everyday use of the term ‘to become institutionalised’ typically refers to the way, over time, an individual’s practice conforms routinely to the norms of an organisation or social setting. Models explaining the institutionalisation of organisations (eg Scott, 2014), parallel such everyday usage. They indicate the way individuals in organisations interpret cultural norms, ways of working, and expectations, and, in so-doing, legitimise their behaviour, and the legitimacy of the organisation. Our starting point here is that institutionalisation processes can have a substantial effect on the practice of teachers. As a consequence, teachers may become institutionalised as a particular kind of teacher, which in turn affects their identity.

In essence, identity refers to the ‘kind of person’ an individual is in a particular context (Gee, 2001). Teacher identity can change: ‘*Shifts may occur throughout a teacher’s career as a result of interactions within schools and in broader communities*’ (Beauchamp and Thomas (2009, p.175). Despite that assertion, research on the development of teacher identity typically focusses on initial teacher preparation, or novice teacher stages (eg Edwards and Edwards, 2017; Friesen and Besley, 2013; Morrison, 2013). Our interest here is to explore identity changes later in a teacher’s career.

We focus on a particular type of educational organisation. Many ‘International Schools’ are authorised by the Geneva-registered International Baccalaureate (IB) to provide one or more of its three main programmes. These schools are increasingly identified as ‘elite International Schools’ (eg Tarc and Mishra Tarc, 2015).

Our experience as teachers, teacher educators and researchers (Bunnell, Fertig, and James, 2016; 2017) indicates that the institutionalisation of such schools as a result of the

requirements of the authorisation process may significantly affect the identity of experienced teachers who teach those programmes. Hence our focus on this type of ‘IB World School’ in our article, as an illustrative example.

The effect of the institutionalisation process on the identity of more experienced teachers is an issue that is significant beyond the particular case we are focussing on. The growth of chains of ‘International Schools’ and strongly branded multi-academy trusts in England (Simon, 2016), such as the ARK Academy chain (ARK, 2019) or the Harris Federation (Harris Federation, 2019) may well have implications for teacher identity.

Our intention in this article is to report our analysis of organisational institutionalisation processes, and their effects on teachers and particularly on teacher identity. We focus on the institutionalisation of ‘elite International Schools’, those that are authorised to provide IB programmes. In particular we examine the way institutionalising processes affect the practice of teachers, and subsequently institutionalise them into particular ways of working, and influence their identity.

Our article starts with analyses of the notions of institutionalisation and teacher identity. We then consider the nature of IB programmes and the requirements for ‘IB World School’ status. In the methodology and methods section, we set out the research design, data collection and analysis methods, and ethical considerations. We then describe the findings, and discuss key issues to emerge from our analysis. At the end, we recap on our study, and set out our conclusions.

## **The notion of institutionalisation**

In this section, we discuss the origins of institutionalisation, new institutionalism, institutional isomorphism, institutional legitimacy and the institutional primary task.

The institutional analyses of organisations has a long history (Rowan and Miskel (1999) beginning with the work of Selznick in the 1940s. He argued that the processes and structures of organisations were significantly conditioned by the influence of their immediate environments (Selznick, 1948). Parsons (1960) furthered this perspective taking a slightly different view. He argued that organisations are sub-systems of the wider social system. They gain legitimacy and resources by conforming to relevant norms, values and technical traditions institutionalised in wider society. In order to survive, organisations construct their processes and structures to emphasise compliance with societal institutions in the organisation's environment and in ways that promote legitimacy as opposed to efficiency.

In the 1970s, the institutionalisation of organisations re-emerged as a focus of interest in organisational theory with the work of Meyer and Rowan (1978, 1977). It initiated the era of 'new institutionalism'. This perspective sees social actors as embedded in socially organised environments that generate rules, regulations and norms which in turn shape action: *'The goal of new institutionalism is to study how such environments arise and to investigate their effects on social action'* (Rowan and Miskel (1999, p.359). Arguably, such a perspective views organisational actors as passive in the face of the pressures of institutionalisation. This view was countered by Oliver (1991), who contended that organisational actors are not passive in their response to institutionalising forces. Indeed, they may respond strategically in a range of ways in order to ensure the survival of the organisation. Organisational actors may: acquiesce, compromise, avoid, defy or manipulate the institutionalising pressures to suit their

strategic aims. The way organisations respond to societal institutionalising pressures from the environment affects their chances of survival (Oliver, 1991).

Scott (2014), whose work we draw on here, captures these interactional complexities, viewing them as top-down and bottom-up processes of institutional creation and diffusion. Top-down institutionalising pressures from societal institutions constrain and create organisational structures and individual agency. They achieve these outcomes through regulative processes (laws and regulations), normative processes (standards, values and principles) and cultural-cognitive processes (sense-making schemes and frames). Bottom-up pressures from organisational actors may reproduce or challenge and change existing and new institutional pressures in a range of ways. Organisational actors may achieve these outcomes by interpreting or manipulating policies and regulations, seeking to establish new norms, and reframing sense-making schemas. The motivation of organisational actors to acquiesce, compromise, avoid, defy or manipulate institutionalising forces is clearly significant. Indeed, those in an organisation's environment may respond in a range of ways to those responses of organisational actors (Meyer et al, 1978; Rowan, 1982).

Over time, organisations in the same institutional sector become less varied and more homogenous as a result of institutionalising pressures, especially when that sector is well established (DiMaggio and Powell (1983). An institutional sector comprises those organisations in the same *“domain of activity involving the production and distribution of a particular service or product”* (Rowan and Miskell, 1999, p.366). It includes all those 'producers' and all those agencies that interact with and support these organisations. This development of homogeneity is known as coercive isomorphism (Rowan and Miskel, 1999), a process whereby the rules and regulations laid down by the state and/or other agencies leads

to the development of similar structures and procedures. Grounded in principal-agent theory (Jensen and Meckling, 1978), this perspective argues that a principal of some kind, for example, the International Baccalaureate Organisation, uses a range of inducements to encourage conformance by agents, which in this example, would be IB World Schools. Policy inducements in the education sector generally, and specifically in this example, would include incentives, authorisations and opportunities to build capacity (McDonnell and Elmore, 1987).

The way organisations respond to institutionalising pressures has implications for their legitimacy, that is, the sense that the actions of a social entity are proper, right and appropriate in a way consistent with socially created conventions, principles, and interpretations (Suchman 1995). Conformance to institutionalised rules ensures legitimacy and the organisation's survival (Oliver 1991). Arguably, inspection and accreditation regimes have an important role in ensuring this conformance.

These perspectives on institutionalisation, and in particular the conformance to regulative processes, normative processes, cultural-cognitive processes, are open to critique on the grounds that they leave unclear what a particular institution in an institutional sector exists to do. Following an analysis of the institutionalisation of International Schools (Bunnell, Fertig, and James, 2016; 2017) argued for a central place for the institutional primary task in institutionalisation, which is in essence is 'what the institution is there to do'. The institutional primary task is significant. First, the task an organisation engages in must be legitimate to ensure institutional legitimacy. Second, the institutional primary task shapes the regulative, normative, cultural-cognitive processes of institutionalisation. It underpins those processes and the way they are communicated and evidenced. Third, the institutional primary task has

considerable psychological significance for those who are required to work on it and may, for example, generate high levels of anxiety (Rice, 1963).

Consequently, they may seek to defend themselves against working on the primary task in a range of ways (James, 2010), which in turn has implications for institutionalisation. Given the complex nature of schools and their significance in society, analysing the institutionalisation processes brought to bear on them is particularly problematic (Bunnell, Fertig, and James, 2016; 2017). In the next section, we turn our attention to the way the institutionalisation of schools can be analysed.

### **Analysing the institutionalisation of organisations**

The processes of institutionalisation of schools are likely to be extensive and varied as a result of the complexity of the interactions between a school and those groups and agencies in its environment (Hawkins and James, 2018). An analytical framework for categorising and understanding institutionalisation processes is therefore of value. The framework advanced by Scott (2014) is particularly useful in this regard. In this section, we discuss the framework, paying particular attention to the ways institutionalisation processes are communicated. We also consider the special nature of the cultural cognitive aspect of the framework which deals with the way institutionalisation forces impact on sense-making and action.

Scott's analytical framework (Scott 2014) is grounded in the long-standing view that institutionalisation forces comprise rules/regulations and norms that shape understanding and action. It acknowledges the top-down and bottom-up processes to which Oliver (1991) drew attention. Scott's analytical framework also provides an insight into the ways the processes of institutionalisation are communicated. Scott (2014) argues for three institutionalising



elements, which he refers to as pillars because they support institutionalisation. The first is the regulative pillar, which includes rule-setting, monitoring and sanctioning activities. The second is the normative pillar, which encompasses the expectations of an institution and comprises values, norms, and customary practices that help to form of a distinct mode of operation. Finally, there is the cultural-cognitive pillar, which is the shared understandings of reality and the jointly-held sense-making schema that enable meaning-making and interpretation.

### ***The carriers of institutionalisation***

The three pillars of institutionalisation are communicated and made evident by carriers (Jepperson, 1991). Scott (2014) identifies four types: symbolic systems, relational systems, activities, and artefacts, all of which should relate directly on the institutional primary task (Bunnell, Fertig, and James, 2016; 2017). Symbolic systems are *'the rules, values, norms, classifications, frames, schemas, prototypes and scripts'* (Scott 2014, p.97). Relational carriers are the widely shared patterns of interaction within role systems in the institution, such as authority and governance systems. Activities are various practices that enact the pillars. Artefacts are material objects created under the influence of the cultural or physical environment (Suchman 2003).

### ***The special nature of the cultural-cognitive pillar***

The cultural-cognitive pillar and its relationship with the institutional primary task (Bunnell, Fertig, and James, 2016; 2017) are of particular interest in relation to our research. This pillar promotes and engenders a particular thought-style (Douglas, 1986), that is, the way institution members/actors think about institutional phenomena. This institutional thought-style influences individuals to think and behave in similar ways, almost irrespective of whether

they agree (Rytivaara, 2012). Rules which have a specific institutional rationale develop, and a collective consciousness is created (Douglas, 1982). Over time, organisational actors become institutionalised as the multiple logics, those associated sets of practices and constructions that provide frames of reference, affect individuals' behaviour choices (Friedland and Alford, 1991).

The particular ontological nature of the cultural-cognitive pillar that supports work on the institutional primary task is also of interest. Bunnell, Fertig, and James (2016; 2017) have argued that the ontological nature of this pillar contrasts with that of the other two pillars. The cultural-cognitive pillar requires a particular process of interpretation and sense-making by institutional actors and is a relativist conception of culture (Connolly, James and Beales, 2011). However, the dimensions of the regulative pillar and the normative pillar are realist in an ontological sense.

### ***Carriers of the cultural-cognitive pillar***

Given the special nature of the cultural-cognitive pillar, the carriers of this pillar, and the way they underpin institutional work (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2009) on the primary task, are of particular interest. Symbolic systems that carry the cultural-cognitive pillar are concerned with common conceptions of the nature of reality and shared sense-making. They include classifications, groupings, frameworks and models. The way relational systems carry the cultural-cognitive pillar lies in the extent to which the relational systems within the institution conform to those in other similar institutions. This similarity then informs and enables a shared sense-making of the experience of being part of the institution. The various activities that carry the cultural-cognitive pillar are those that relate to tendencies, inclinations and dominant modes of practice, logics and discourse. These activities are important in that

they tend to shape interpretations of appropriate action in relation to the institutional primary task in a particular institutional setting. Artefacts that carry the cultural-cognitive pillar relate to the shared understandings and interpretive schema. They are those objects that have emblematic or representational significance and will include displays, signs, mission statements, and explicit visual claims of status.

### **The concept of teacher identity**

Gee (2001) asserts that identity suggests a ‘kind of person’ within a particular context. While individuals might have a ‘core identity’, there are multiple forms of this identity as individuals operate in different contexts. Gee (2001) identifies four ways in which an individual’s identity are founded: (1) Nature-identity, which stems from the person’s natural state; (2) Institution-identity, which is derived from a position recognized by authority; (3) Discourse-identity, which results from the others’ discourse about the person; and (4) Affinity–identity, which is determined by the individual’s practices in relation to external groups.

Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) argue that teacher identity encompasses various concepts including agency, emotion, sense-making and context. It is ‘*shaped and reshaped in interaction with others in a professional context*’ (p.178), characteristics that contribute to its problematic nature. Clarke (2009) supports this view of teacher identity being affected by context. Teacher identity is important and has significant implications for teacher education in the initial career phase and further development as a teacher’s career progresses (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). As Buchanan (2015, p 705) asserts:

*'Teachers make and remake themselves by drawing on their current self-conceptions and then acting in ways that seek to match those self-conceptions.'*

The literature on teacher-identity often views it as a democratic process that involves self-actualisation and consent. Freese (2006 p.100), for example, argues for allowing teachers to discover their 'teacher selves'. For Britzman (2003, p.22), *'much of their (teachers') time is taken up with negotiating, constructing, and consenting to their identity as a teacher.'* Teacher identity is thus both product, that is, a result of influences on the teacher, and process, a form of ongoing interaction within teacher development (Sfard and Prusak, 2005). We are, therefore, focusing on the concepts of agency and context in relation to the interactions between individuals and their environments, and the ways in which individual agents are affected by this process.

Alvesson's (2001) work on identity construction in *'knowledge intensive companies'* (p.876) found that the levels of ambiguity evident in these companies in terms of processes and outcomes have increased the significance of identity construction *'due to problems of control as well as the consequences of ambiguity on self-esteem'* (Alvesson, 2001, p.876). He goes on to argue that management *'is partly about regulating people's identities - establishing standards for how employees should define themselves'* (Alvesson, 2001, p.878). Schools can be viewed as 'knowledge intensive' institutions. As such, the ongoing development of teacher identities provides rich insights into the impact of variable and changing contexts upon identity construction.

Ashforth and Mael (1989) have suggested that *'individuals tend to choose activities congruent with salient aspects of their identities'* (p.25). The notion of archetypal behaviour is important

here. Archetypes, which are the central feature of Jung's conceptualisation of the collective unconscious (Lawson, 2008), predispose individuals to particular behaviours in appropriate environmental conditions. Importantly, archetypal structures are widely shared amongst all humans. The existence of archetypal structures may have a role in establishing the notion of a vocation, for example teaching, and the desire to respond to such a calling. There is sufficient anecdotal evidence to support that notion in relation to teaching. Ashforth and Mael (1989) further argue that individuals not only choose activities that support their identities but they also '*support the institutions embodying those identities*' (p.25). This view bears a close affinity to ideas about the relationship between the development of teacher identity and professional development activities (Farrell, 2011; Noonan, 2018).

Teacher identity is a complex phenomenon, has various aspects, and is open to change (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). Studies that have analysed teacher professional identity for example, Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) have indicated that teacher identity is not fixed or stable, but is an ongoing process. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009 p.177) support this view arguing that: '*a teacher's identity shifts over time under the influence of a range of factors*'. However, the nature of the factors and how they exert their influence on the identity of teachers requires further exploration. Hence our focus upon exploring the ways in which institutionalisation impacts upon teacher identity with our specific interest in how that happens in experienced, rather than beginning, teachers.

## **The International Baccalaureate as an organisation and its programmes**

In this section, we consider the International Baccalaureate (IB) as an organisation, the strong pedagogic identity of its programmes and the authorisation of schools to provide IB programmes.

### ***The International Baccalaureate as an organisation***

The IB is a strongly mission-driven organisation (Hill, 2010). It has a radical philosophy and mission, which reflect its Cold War origins and evolution from the International School of Geneva, and Kurt Hahn's United World College of the Atlantic. Over time, the IB has developed a robust corporate brand. The Mission Statement of the IB Organisation (IBO) asserts that:

*'The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect'*  
(IBO, 2013, p.1).

This commitment is reflected in its expectation of IB World Schools, which are those authorised by the IB to provide at least one of its programmes. IB World Schools:

*'share a common philosophy - a commitment to improve the teaching and learning of a diverse and inclusive community of students by delivering challenging, high quality programmes of international education that share a powerful vision'* (IBO, 2019, p.1)

There are now four IB programmes. The IB Diploma Programme (IBDP) for students aged between 16 and 18 years (IBO, 2009) was established in 1962 (Hill, 2010) and is seen as *'a reliable product conforming to consistent quality standards throughout the world'* (Cambridge, 2002, p.227). The IB Primary Years Programme (PYP) and an IB Middle Years Programme (MYP), were developed in the early 2000s forming what the IB calls its *'continuum of international education'* (IBO, 2013, p.1). There is also a Career-related Programme (CP), which in recent years has developed a strong presence in publicly-funded

schools in South-East England. In early 2019, there were 4,998 schools in 153 countries providing 6,521 IB programmes (IBO, 2019). There were 3,280 schools offering the IBDP worldwide. Sixty per cent of these were publicly-funded schools in the United States. A further 8% worldwide are private ‘International Schools’, representing the original base of IB programme provision.

### ***The strong pedagogic identity of International Baccalaureate programmes***

The terms used by the IB to describe its programmes gives those programmes their own distinct pedagogic identity (Cambridge, 2002). The IB Learner Profile, which is a ten-point list of student attributes and learning outcomes that appeared in mid-2006 (Wells, 2011), made clear the set of terms used to describe the learning philosophy. For example, those studying for IB programmes become critical, tolerant, inquiring, compassionate and principled. The development of international mindedness is a further key intended outcome of IB programmes (Barratt Hacking et al, 2018). For Singh and Qi (2013 p.2):

*‘International Mindedness is explicitly associated with the values, attitudes, understanding and skills manifested in multilingualism, intercultural understanding and global engagement.’*

Others, for example, Grimshaw (2005) and Quist (2005) have made direct reference to the emerging language of the IB. In an ‘IB World School’, students might instead be called ‘Learners’ or ‘Inquirers’. The ex-IB Director General, George Walker, has described terms such as ‘intercultural understanding’ and ‘critical-thinking’ as the vocabulary of the IB, indicative of a sub-cultural identity and a growing sense of community (Walker, 2002).

### ***The authorisation of schools to provide IB programmes***

The IB has developed, over time, a complex and robust authorisation process, coupled with continuous on-going evaluation for those schools wishing to provide IB programmes. The IB states that: *‘Authorisation is a milestone in the life of an IB World School, not the finish line’* (IBO, 2018). The process of becoming an authorised ‘IB World School’ takes between two and three years, and includes five separate stages of endorsement.

A school intending to becoming an ‘IB World School’, which at that stage is referred to as a ‘Candidate School’, is required to examine the IB philosophy and mission to see how the school’s mission can be aligned and made compatible with the authorisation requirements. The Candidate School must also show plans for the professional development of its staff. The school staff are given access to a Programme Resource Centre, a website providing IB publications, teacher support materials, and access to online forums of IB teachers around the world.

Once authorised, the school’s name will appear on the IB website. An authorised school may also display the ‘IB World School’ logo and other information in their marketing and publicity materials. An authorised school is expected to become involved with a local or regional association and can also participate in regional activities and events, which include annual regional conferences. Importantly, all the school’s teachers must attend initial and on-going professional development workshops, delivered by approved workshop leaders, where the IB language is learned and developed. This continuous professional development *‘is a mandatory requirement’* (IBO, 2018 p.1). For the IB it *‘helps ensure the integrity of one of the world’s most forward-thinking educational frameworks’* (IBO, 2018 p.1). The IB has also created a platform for in-house career development. The authorisation website states: *‘IB*



*World Schools are part of a strong community and network of fellow schools and educators who collaborate internationally'* (IBO, 2018). Staff from schools with experience of IB programme provision are invited to work with those involved in all aspects of IB provision and development.

Every five years, and typically more frequently, a school's standing as an 'IB World School' is evaluated. As part of that evaluation process, the school engages in a self-study, which is a key element in the school's continual improvement. Every 10 years, the school is inspected by a team comprising IB educators from other schools, which is intended to ensure that conformity to the required standards (IBO, 2018).

## **The research methodology**

### **The respondents**

The research aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. How is institutionalisation experienced by teachers?
2. Does institutionalisation configure a teacher's identity?

We undertook the research during the Postgraduate Summer School at University of Bath in July 2016, which is attended by a large number of experienced teachers working in 'IB World Schools' undertaking postgraduate programmes. In the main, these teachers work in either the IB Pacific (IBP), or IB Africa/Europe/Middle East (IBAEM) regions. The IB Americas (IBA) region tends to be under-represented at this Postgraduate Summer School, although this region has by far the most IB teachers worldwide. Fourteen respondents participated in one of four focus groups; five in the first group; five in the second, and two in each of the third and fourth.

After the fourth session we noted that a point of data saturation had been reached (Fusch and Ness 2015). Following the four focus groups, one IB teacher was interviewed, in order to confirm data saturation and to further explore the issues that had emerged from the focus groups data analysis.

At the time of the data collection, all the participants were, or had until recently been, teachers of IB programmes in private IB World Schools. These schools are a specific type of IB school, reflecting the founding base of schools that pioneered the IB in the 1960s (Hill, 2010). The participants' experience of IB teaching ranged from 3 months to 16 years. The sample included teachers of all the three main IB programmes for students aged between three and 19 years. All the participants had undertaken their initial teacher training in non-IB World Schools.

In the focus groups, we collected the data using the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). The focus group sessions explored the participants' experience of being teachers in an IB World Schools, the expectations placed upon them in those settings, and how, as a consequence, they viewed themselves as teachers. NGT has a number of strengths and advantages over other methods. It has particular value in situations where particular respondents might hold and articulate especially strong views, as might be expected to be the case with experienced school-teachers. NGT has been widely used in a range of settings (Carney, McIntosh and Worth, 1996; Chapple and Murphy, 1996). The sessions were recorded and typically lasted for one hour.

The research complied with the University of Bath's requirements for ethical conduct of research, and the guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018).

Following each focus group meeting, and the interview, the data was transcribed. The transcribed data set was analysed using the Thematic Analysis (TA) model (Braun and Clarke, 2006). First, the transcripts were analysed for word-frequency. This process revealed a listing of the 740 words with more than two letters that had appeared more than once during the focus groups sessions. Table 1 below shows the frequency of the 15 most frequently mentioned words in the data set.

TABLE HERE

Second, and again following the TA analysis model (Braun and Clarke, 2006), the word listing was analysed for similarities which might form a discrete theme. This process showed, for example, that ‘workshop/s’ was the third most mentioned word, appearing 43 times in total. Further, the word ‘training’ was the 10<sup>th</sup> most mentioned word, appearing 14 times, whilst ‘conferences’ was separately mentioned four times. This set of three inter-connected words, mentioned unprompted 64 times across five separate data-gathering sessions, combines into a strong theme, revealing the importance of attendance at IB-authorised training workshops and conferences. Interestingly, the word ‘language’ was the eighth most mentioned word. When added to ‘talking’ (14 mentions), a discrete theme is created which referred to the use of particular IB terms and phrases, which emerged as a significant feature of IB workshops and conferences. This TA analysis process allowed discrete themes and illustrative quotes to be identified. In the next section, we set out and illustrate the themes that emerged from the data analysis, in order of prevalence.

## **The findings**

### ***The importance of shared experiences***

Having shared experiences with other teachers around the world emerged as the most important theme (the term ‘experience’ was mentioned 13 times). It was considered to be crucial, especially when teachers engage in IB workshops for the first time. As noted already, the concept of the ‘training workshop’ dominated all the data-gathering sessions. The important role of such a shared experience is illustrated by the following comment:

*‘The first time you attend PD (professional development) you see that bigger sense of people like you, especially in regional conferences . . . there are people who just like you are going through this.’*

This initial exposure to the IB community could be an important moment of initiation. For one respondent, becoming an IB educator was *‘like starting a journey’*, and the term ‘journey’ appeared four times. The requirement to attend training away from the school emerged as a key sub-theme. In the words of another respondent:

*‘The value of going outside the school and meeting with other members of the IB community, it is an opportunity to network and share.’*

Participation in learning activities away from the school was valued more highly than in-school development events. As one respondent put it:

*‘I don’t think having somebody come to your school to train you is the same thing, we’ve got many people that do in-school workshops.’*

### ***A common and shared language***

The feature of the IB programmes having a common and shared language was a further very robust theme in the data. Much of this ‘language’ will have been learned at the aforementioned workshops. A number of respondents referred to it simply as the ‘lingo’ of the IB, with one respondent saying of the IB terminology:

*‘It’s absolutely everywhere, it’s on the wall, it’s the lingo, the branding is everywhere, you walk into an IB World School and they shout it at you from the moment you walk in the door, it’s part of the discourse, and so the IB terminology is absolutely everywhere - it’s pervasive.’*

The term ‘branding’ appeared 10 times. Further, the term ‘Learner’ was the fifth most frequently mentioned word, and was more prominent than the term ‘Children’ (only used 11 times), revealing the depth of usage of the IB’s ‘language’ across all the main programmes.

### ***The sharing of common resources***

Being able to share resources used by peers in other IB-member institutions, some of which the educators had met at training workshops, was a key theme in the data. The concept appeared 48 times (either as ‘share’, ‘sharing’, or ‘shared’). One respondent recalled:

*‘In my school at that time we had only one person who worked in a previous IB school so we used what they had done in that school’.*

The teacher referred to these resources as providing a much needed *‘frame of reference’*. The movement of teachers between IB World Schools was also significant and facilitated this sharing of resources: *‘People coming into school from other IB schools bring stuff with them’*. Teachers are able to share resources with each other, especially when teachers arrive from another IB school: *‘so literally, you can draw a wealth of expertise from within the school’*.

The sharing of resources impacted on the respondents as teachers and also contributed to the sense that there was an IB community. In the words of one respondent:

*'IB world schools are all over the world....so sharing commonalities and common language at workshops conferences gives you an understanding of the IB'.*

### ***The common and shared artefacts***

The internal environment of the 'IB World School' emerged as being very important. Respondents reported that a school would display the corporate IB logo, and evidence of the provision of the IB programmes would typically be very prominent and immediate. In the words of one respondent:

*'In the school I'm at right now, the moment you get past the security guard the walls have the Learner Profile, every classroom has the IB mission statement and Learner Profile posters displayed.'*

The word 'everywhere' was mentioned eight times. The schools would typically have a large number of displays of the IB brand, mainly as posters (the word 'posters' was mentioned 10 times). Many of these portray the messages of the IB Learner Profile. Respondents interpreted the prominence of these displays as a physical way of showing that the school is connected to the IB brand: *'I think you get a feel when you walk into an IB school - you get this sense of community.'* Linked to this, the word 'environment' was mentioned six times.

### ***Being part of a small network globally***

The respondent's sense that the 'IB World' is still relatively 'small', constituting a shared community was a significant theme in the data. The term 'community' appeared 11 times, and 'network' appeared a further six times. The word 'system' was also used, seven times, and 'structure' appeared 11 times. The apparent size of the network meant that IB teachers would meet up regularly: *'The network is quite small in Singapore so the 17 PYP schools can meet on a regular basis.'*

Also, members of the IB network can play a part in the curriculum assessment systems, so respondents reported feeling part of the whole IB process beyond the classroom. One respondent stated: *'My husband still moderates the IB'* and that her: *'Former director of studies still is a chief examiner . . . so you know IB world colleagues'*. Also, the nature of the IB network enables teachers to gain promotion within the IB curriculum provision and assessment systems. As one respondent said:

*'Within the IB there are variety of roles so you can become school visitor and leader and consultant, there's a bit of hierarchy there as well, but I also find that in terms of employability having that you're a workshop leader on your resumé, that's considered pretty good.'*

### ***A common and shared philosophy and beliefs***

Teachers needing to have a philosophy and set of values in common with the IB emerged as a theme. The word 'mission' was used 12 times, and 'values' appeared nine times, alongside 14 mentions of the word 'common'. One respondent specifically referred to the: *'common language and belief.'* Another teacher felt that: *'At the bottom line, it's the philosophical alignment between the IB philosophy of education and mine'*. The idea of IB teachers having a common set of beliefs amongst themselves and with the IB was a significant theme in the

data. Thus: *'Being part of a bigger network - a broader community . . . being part of something being united by a common belief'*. This particular respondent went on to add:

*'I know a lot of people say sometimes it's like a religion in the way that you engage within that community and are united by common belief.'*

One respondent described the experience of being an IB teacher as *'being part of something that makes a difference'*. The sense of joining a community that was special in some way featured as a sub-theme theme in the analysis, with one respondent feeling: *'being part of a brand'* that had some standing with another respondent referring to *'the status of an international teacher'*.

### ***The reference to a common overarching entity***

The feature of the IB being a common over-arching body or entity of some kind was another strong theme in the dataset. There were direct references to *'the IB'* and *'the people in The Hague'*, a reference to the biggest of the IB's three 'Global Centres' (IBO, 2019). Interestingly, the term 'The Hague' was mentioned six times. Respondents referred to teachers, including themselves, *'joining the IB'*. One respondent said that: *'I remember the feelings before I joined the IB.'* Another respondent implied that the IB has *'expectations'* of teachers that had to be addressed: *'The only thing I was not sure about was whether the internal assessment was as expected and what the IB wanted.'*

### ***The personal investment involved***

Respondents reported that the process of becoming and remaining an IB teacher required considerable commitment and the investment of time and resources. In the terms used by one respondent, they felt that they had *'invested'* a lot of time and effort in becoming an *'IB*



*educator*'. Another respondent said: *'I've invested a lot of my life in the IB's requirements and training'*. This effort was substantial and seen as additional to typical professional development activities. However, the outcome for this participant was worthwhile: *'It's a lot of work becoming a real (his emphasis) IB teacher, it's not just a stamp.'*

### ***Common regulations and standards***

The IB having a common sense of standards and practices reinforced the notion of an 'IB community' and clearly impacted on the respondents. It was a substantial theme in the data. As one respondent put it:

*'You're always looking through the lens of IB standards of practices and making sure that you are ticking the boxes.'*

### ***The pressure to act like an 'IB educator'***

The pressure to act like an '*IB educator*', a term openly used by several respondents, emerged as a theme during the data analysis. Part of that pressure arose from the resource cost of the authorisation process and the subsequent on-going compliance to requirements. This requirement to conform could be a considerable pressure:

*'I'm based in West Africa, and (the IB) membership fees are high so the stakes are high, so I need to make sure whether I like it or not that my classrooms are well-stocked and the resources are there, it's a challenge because it's not a cheap form of education.'*

Also, because the IB is constantly changing and developing its programmes, teachers are under pressure to keep abreast of developments:

*‘The IB teacher has to be flexible, I see the programmes keep changing and I keep adapting, so you need to be flexible and adaptive to change.’*

The key point to observe here is that the teachers clearly feel a constant pressure to conform to the IB’s requirements. The issue of regulation emerged through the use of ‘requirement’ (six mentions) alongside ‘expectations’ (four mentions).

## **Discussion**

In this section we reflect on the main themes to arise from the data analysis in relation to the key concepts we considered in the literature review. It is clear that the institutionalising forces on the respondents, all of whom had undertaken their initial teacher training in non-IB World Schools and who were or had been until recently been teachers in IB World Schools, were considerable and impacted on their identity. We thus discuss those forces and the way they were conveyed or carried; the way the identity of the teachers shifted as they became institutionalised; and the strength and nature of the institutionalising forces that led to them being almost coercive in the way they worked.

### ***The institutionalising forces and the effect on teacher identity***

The robust IB authorisation process (IBO, 2018) that endows the ‘IB World School’ status on a school and enables such a school to enter its students for IB examinations and use the logo/brand is a strong institutionalising force. It was experienced as the IB being an overarching entity whose regulatory requirements had to be met. The compulsory attendance at IB workshops felt like a rite of passage into the group for some respondents. Joining this all-embracing body clearly impacted on the teachers’ identity, as, in a sense, they became ‘something different’, as opposed to simply learning new capabilities.

The institutionalisation processes appeared to have the implicit purpose of ensuring that the legitimacy of the school as a provider on the IB curriculum was secure. Provision of the IB curriculum was thus the institutional primary task and being an authorised IB World School (IBO, 2018) required the school and the teachers who worked in it to conform to a specific and detailed set of standards. Here we see the forces of the regulatory pillar (Scott, 2014) at work in influencing the teachers' identity. However, such is the nature of these regulatory forces, they also had a powerful effect structuring the normative pillar (Scott, 2014) - the ideals, principles, customs, and the expected and routine practices that help to form a distinctive *modus operandi*. Compulsory attendance at an IB workshop and the sharing of teaching resources will have played a significant part here. They will have had a role in the development of a shared philosophy and set of beliefs in the IB teachers, which was also a strong theme in the data. The teachers clearly experienced this force, which then affected their identity.

The cultural-cognitive institutionalising forces (Scott, 2014) have a significant impact on teacher identity. Immersion in the 'IB way of working' affected how the teachers made sense of and interpreted educational phenomena. It clearly influenced how teachers thought about pedagogic matters and, importantly, their identity as IB educators. The respondents' shared experiences emerged as a powerful theme in the data. The IB teachers appeared to join a group who have similar experiences and think and interpret pedagogic phenomena similarly. The sharing of teaching resources, which was valued by the IB teachers, is not likely to be successful unless the pedagogic practice teachers involved is similar. They would need to share a similar pedagogic thought-style (Douglas, 1986).

The cultural-cognitive influences on the identity of IB teachers appeared to be carried substantively in the language used to understand and interpret pedagogic matters. It conditioned teachers' thinking in text-based artefacts, seen in the data theme related to a common and shared language. The significance of language is also apparent in the common and shared philosophy and beliefs theme. The IB teachers use similar language to describe pedagogic phenomena. Teacher discourse not only reveals identity, but also indicates the way individuals negotiate their identity (Beauchamp and Thomas (2009). We were also struck by the role of artefacts in reinforcing the regulatory and normative institutionalising forces (Scott, 2014). IB-created artefacts such as its Philosophy Statement, Mission Statement and the Learner Profile, displayed prominently around the school and within each classroom acted as powerful conformity symbols. They create the constant sense of being a teacher in an authorised IB World School.

The role of the carriers of the cultural-cognitive pillar (Scott, 2014) in shaping an IB teacher's identity, brings to the fore the different ontological nature of the cultural-cognitive compared with the regulative and normative pillars. The carriers of the regulative pillar - rule-setting, and checking and authorising activities - and those of the normative pillar - the articulated ideals and principles and the observed customs and routine practices - are evident in the social world of the school. However, the carriers of the cultural-cognitive pillar relate to how institution members interpret and make sense of those phenomena. A particular thought style (Douglas, 1986) is developed, which influences the way institutional actors think about institutional matters. The development of this collective consciousness (Douglas, 1982) provide frames of reference and rationales, which in turn affect teachers' practice, and also changes their identity.

From the data, it is evident that through their work in an IB World School, the institution identity, the discourse identity and the affinity identity (Gee 2001) of teachers of IB curricula is changed. Moreover, the data supports Alvesson's (2001) assertions that those with management responsibility for the conduct of the organisation are significantly concerned with regulating people's identities, and specifying how an organisation's members should define themselves.

### *The coercive nature of the institutionalising forces*

Overall, the institutionalising forces reported above can be seen as quite coercive. Thus the pressure to act like an IB educator was a substantive theme in the data. Part of the pressure was to justify the personal investment – another data theme – which becoming an IB teacher necessitated. Interestingly, we did not identify any strong resentment to any sense of coercion. Indeed, the teachers in our study were very positive about their work as IB teachers, the IB curricula and the IB as an organisation.

The values and ideals of the IB (IBO, 2013) appeared to speak to the teachers' 'natural identity' (Gee, 2001) as teachers, a professional occupation they were called to pursue. The teachers may be particularly susceptible to the kinds of institutionalising forces that substantively shape their identity and that create an attachment to a set of very high level educational beliefs and values. This change in identity seemed deep and significant for IB teachers. None of the teachers in our study considered that they would move into, or back into, a non-IB World School. In this respect, the institutionalising forces and the consequent changes to teacher identity has the effect of establishing a loyal and supportive body of IB teachers.

### ***The development of teacher identity as a dynamic process***

Our findings show that the institutionalisation process of becoming an ‘IB Educator’ is a dynamic one, involving a process of events over time. Very clearly, the data illustrates that the identity of experienced teachers can change and that the identity formed initially at the start of a teacher’s career pathway can change significantly. Our findings thus reflect the wider literature on teacher identity (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009) but show this change empirically and also show specifically that the institutionalising forces have a central role in bringing about this change in identity.

### ***Teacher identity change as an unintended consequence of institutionalisation***

Overall, the institutionalising process that we identify comprises a set of strong forces that bear on the teachers’ interpretation of themselves and their institutional practice. However, there is scope for seeing this effect on the teachers as accidental and an unintended consequence of the requirements put in place by the IB through the IB authorisation process. Over time, the IB has established a set of robust instruments for ensuring that the school becomes a legitimate ‘IB World School’, and these also act as a method of ensuring that the teachers within the school act as ‘IB Educators’. This effect on the teacher’s and their identity may be an unintended by-product of the authorisation process. At the same time, there is the alternative view-point that the IB has deliberately created, over time, a robust quality-assurance framework which imposes common standards across a wide variety of cultural environments. In this context, the usage of the IB ‘lingo’ can be viewed as a by-product of a deliberate policy towards maintaining the strength of the IB brand. In both cases, the ‘institutionalising’ process that affects educators can be viewed as a coercive one emerging through regulation and a strong set of norms.

## Concluding Comments

In our study, we have explored the effect of institutionalisation on the teacher identity of more experienced teachers who work in a growing network of schools, ‘elite International Schools’ that have been granted ‘IB World Schools’ (IBO, 2018) status, gained by a robust initial and on-going authorisation process. By collecting and analysing the experiences of teachers who work in this particular type of schools, we have illustrated the effect that the institutionalisation forces required by authorisation can have on teacher identity. It is clear that the authorisation process enabled, in a colloquial sense, the institutionalisation of the teachers in our sample. Our research illustrates these institutionalising forces, and shows how the identity of experienced teachers can change significantly. In our study, teacher identity can be seen as being a dynamic process. The institutionalisation process in this case appears to be coercive in the way that teachers are expected to change their identity. However, the teachers appear to be willing participants in the process, and any sense of coercion may be an unintended consequence of seeking to establish robust and secure ways of working that will ensure institutional legitimacy.

The issue we have explored has widespread interest beyond the particular case we have focussed on. The number of authorised ‘IB World Schools’ continues to grow, especially in publically-funded schooling contexts. In addition, chains and groups of private ‘International Schools’ are becoming increasingly prevalent, for example GEMS Education, SABIS, Cognita, and Nord Anglia (Bunnell, 2019). Furthermore, there are significant developments occurring in national settings such as in England with the formation and growth of multi-academy trusts such as ARK, and Harris Federation (Greany and Higham 2018; Simon, James and Simon, 2017). Therefore, the issue of the way schools are institutionalised and the effect

on the identity of teachers who work in them is likely to become more significant in a number of different educational contexts.

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